Montage and Theatricality as Sources of Estrangement

A Tendency in Contemporary Brechtian Cinema

Nenad Jovanovic

Although Brecht's interest in cinema was only intermittent, resulting in comparatively few films and critical writings on the medium, he seems referenced with equal frequency in the literatures on theatre and film. The vast range of filmmakers Brecht has been associated with includes figures as diverse as the Brothers Taviani,[1] whose eclectic style is reminiscent of Italian Neorealism, and—somewhat outrageously—the American sexploitation filmmaker Russ Meyer.[2] The mutual disparity between some of the connotations Brecht's name has acquired in film studies has led the critic Jonathan Rosenbaum to conclude that "One of the most abused critical terms we have is 'Brechtian.'"[3] Because of the term's exceptional breadth, what follows will first define it for this paper's purposes, along with the other terms in the title (in the order of their appearance within it). The paper will then proceed to argue, using the examples of Brecht and Slatan Dudow's film *Kuhle Wampe* (1932) and Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Geschichtsunterricht* (*History Lessons*, 1972) and *Die Antigone des Sophokles in der hölderlinschen Übertragung für die Bühne bearbeitet von Brecht* (*Sophocles' Antigone in Hölderlin's Translation as Reworked for the Stage by Brecht*, 1992), that Brechtian cinema is increasingly abandoning the once privileged technique of montage as a source of estrangement in favor of theatricality. While the relevance for Brecht and Brechtian cinema of montage—both in the term's general and its specifically cinematic sense—has been extensively investigated,[4] the relationship between the technique and theatricality as applied in the mentioned contexts remains to be explored.

The first of the title terms that needs definition is *montage*. Perhaps the most famous appearance of the term in Brecht is in "Notes to the

Opera 'Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny'" (1930), the writer's earliest systematic articulation of the Epic Theatre concept.[5] In the table contrasting dramatic and epic theatre, montage—a principle associated with the latter theatrical model—is juxtaposed to growth.[6] As John J. White notes in *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, three pairs of terms that surround the cited one clarify the sense in which "montage" is used in the context:[7]

DRAMATIC THEATRE	EPIC THEATRE
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps

All three contrasts pertain to narrative structure, rather than the other codes of a performance, inscribed in the play text or added in the process of staging. Elsewhere in his writings, however, Brecht uses the term "montage" more broadly, to describe the opposition to the classical and Romantic idea of stylistic organicity,[8] which entails art's concealment of artifice through imitating nature's modes of production.[9] Brecht sometimes refers to montage also in relation to realms other than artistic, a possibility suggested by the term's inherent possession in German of such connotations as construction and assemblage.

For Brecht the theatre practitioner, montage allows, first, the subversion of the Aristotelian unities. Instead of aiming for the impression that scene b "naturally" follows from scene a, and scene c from scene b, an epic play juxtaposes scenes, often employing large chronological gaps to emphasize the changes undergone by the characters during the course of the narrative (to give but one example, *Life of Galileo* spans about three decades of the protagonist's life). Brecht's second use of montage stems from his opposition to Wagner's synergistic concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (or the total work of art), which refers to merging of elements of different arts into a seamless whole. Abandoning this ideal, Brecht proposes their relative independence from each other (the principle of separation, or *Prinzip der Trennung*).

In the context of cinema, and particularly in the English-language discourse on the medium, montage is distinguished from editing to suggest the former's divergence from dominant cinema's aim of creating the illusion of continuity of space and time within film scenes, as well as maintaining a sense of spatial and temporal relationships.[10]

A foremost theorist of cinematic montage and one of few filmmakers Brecht admired, Sergei Eisenstein, identifies several strains of the tech-

nique, of which intellectual editing is the most complex. Eisenstein defines the concept as "combining shots that are *depictive,* single in meaning, neutral in content—into *intellectual* contexts and series."[11] The theorist uses the example of Japanese ideograms to demonstrate the viability of a cinema whose formal operations would be based on the Hegelian dialectical triad, whereby synthesis arises from the opposition between thesis and antithesis.[12] Among the examples Eisenstein gives of images combined within the ideograms to create new meanings are water and an eye (signifying weeping), a mouth and a bird (signifying singing), and a knife and a heart (signifying sorrow). A relatively rare practical application of the concept of intellectual editing in Eisenstein's cinema is found in *October* (1929), where the image of a bridge, being opened to kill the protesters against the regime of tzarism, is juxtaposed with a still image of an Egyptian pharaoh's mask. The (evasive) suggestion of the regime's obsolescence is realized through the combination of the two consecutive images, which represents not their mere sum, but their sublation (or *Aufhebung,* to use Hegel's original term): a (the image of the bridge) + b (the image of the pharaoh's mask) = c (the idea of the obsolescence of the tzarist regime). The originality of this concept becomes apparent when it is compared with parallel editing, a cinematic technique pioneered in the late 1900s by D. W. Griffith. The Griffithian parallel editing conforms to the formula a + b = ab (for example, the chaser, nearing the prey during the course of a sequence, eventually catches her, thus bringing two parallel narrative lines together).[13] As later will be demonstrated, intellectual montage is employed in Brecht's only feature film as a codirector (with Slatan Dudow), *Kuhle Wampe* (1932). It is this strain of montage that the term in this article's title refers to.

Second, *theatricality.* Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis observe that the term theatricality is often used interchangeably with a variety of related but distinct concepts—from mimesis to *theatrum mundi,* from ritual behavior to performativity.[14] In the context of cinema, theatricality can—in Jacques Gerstenkorn's categorization—refer to the following: 1) theatricality as it appears in films that explicitly reference theatrical practice (theatre as content); 2) theatricality as it is produced by a film's use of a characteristically theatrical mode (theatre as a form within a form); 3) theatricality as it is achieved through a process the writer calls recycling (*recyclage*), using a distinctly theatrical convention.[15] All three fit the purposes of this paper.

Third, *estrangement.* The term is one of the English renditions of Brecht's *Verfremdung,*[16] the relation of which concept to dialectics Brecht explains by the triadic formula of "*verstehen—nicht verstehen—verstehen:* understanding—not understanding—understanding."[17] The process of

estrangement, then, involves a double negation, and is only completed when the understanding of an observable phenomenon by the recipient of an artwork is renewed. A possible confusion about this term stems from the fact that it is also used to translate Shklovsky's related term *ostranenie*, whose penetration into critical discourse predates that of *Verfremdung* by a few years, and which differs from Brecht's own concept mainly in its lack of an overt political aspect. The article, of course, uses the term "estrangement" in the sense of *Verfremdung*.

Fourth, *contemporary*. As used here, the term denotes the period that started with the crisis of European communisms in the early 1970s, and culminated with their demise following the reunification of Germany.

Fifth, *Brechtian*. In the context of this paper, the term means: substantially influenced by Brecht's theory of Epic Theatre, as acknowledged by the filmmakers themselves. Brecht's theory advocates a theatre suitable for our "scientific era," which enables—and calls for—the explanation of human condition not in terms of a higher power and its whims, but in terms of (alterable) social forces. This task demanded a realism different from its traditional form, predicated on "a montage of discourses."[18]

How are Brecht's views of montage—and of epic dramaturgy in general—applied to *Kuhle Wampe*? The film consists of three episodes, separated by montage sequences that show "images of apartment buildings, factories and natural landscapes."[19] Editing is foregrounded as a dominant technique by a scene from the film's second part, set in the film's eponymous tent colony, where the central group of characters—the Bönike family—has moved after being evicted from their Berlin apartment due to unpaid rent. The scene shows Bönike, the father, reading aloud a newspaper article on Mata Hari as his wife is calculating grocery prices. The brief low-angle shots of Mrs. Bönike, of both her and her husband, and of her hand compiling the list, are interspersed with nondiegetic shots of food items with price tags, photographed through a store window. The luxurious life of dancer and courtesan Mata Hari is contrasted to the family's daily monetary struggle.

Kuhle Wampe uses montage not only as an editing technique, but also as a structuring dramaturgical principle applied at each of its three parts and their constituent scenes. The three parts form a hierarchy that can be designated as dialectical. The first part, centering on a laborer who commits suicide after a vain job hunt, represents a possible answer to a manifestation of the crisis of capitalism (suicide as thesis). The second part, where the dead laborer's family moves to Kuhle Wampe, represents another answer (eviction as antithesis). While the first two parts center on the concerns of the individual, the third, showing a leftist sports festi-

Kuhle Wampe, directed by Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht, 1932. Used by permission of Praesens Film.

val, focuses on the collective and is constructed as the only satisfactory answer to the crisis of capitalism established in the film's exposition (the workers' mobilization as synthesis). All formal operations that assist the content's dialecticity can be associated with montage, once the concept is broadened to include the sound-image relationship.

The film was banned immediately after the Nazis' ascent to power, and continued to circulate in West Germany only in the late 1960s.[20] Its rediscovery appears to have contributed to the shift in focus of critical investigations into Brecht and cinema from questions of narrative to those of style. A culmination of this process is evidenced in the Brecht-dedicated issue of the British film journal *Screen*. In the article "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," included in the issue, Colin MacCabe hails *Kuhle Wampe* for rejecting the language of dominant cinema. The language—in accord with the principle of self-effacing craftsmanship that dominant cinema borrows from classicism[21]—dematerializes itself to achieve a perfect representation.[22] This influential view of Brecht in relation to cinema has led to frequent equations in film studies of self-reflexivity, Brechtian estrangement, and political progressiveness. The conflation of the two senses of the term "montage" (that

pertaining to narrative on the one hand, and that pertaining to style on the other) may be attributed in part to the use of the term by Eisenstein, who is often classified within the same aesthetico-political category as Brecht.[23] In "The Cinematographic Principle," Eisenstein equates montage with conflict, not only between the elements in adjoining shots, but also between the elements *within* the shots: conflict of graphic directions ("*[l]ines—either static or dynamic,*" either actual or implied through the movement of an object in the shot); conflict of scales (the relative size of objects in the shot); conflict of volumes (the absolute size and shape of objects in the shot); conflict of masses ("*[v]olumes filled with various intensities of light*"); and conflict of depths (the positions of objects in the photographed space and in the film frame).[24] Rainer Friedrich's "On Brecht and Eisenstein" exemplifies the methodological move of applying the term "montage" variably to the narrative and style of Brecht's theatre. Exemplifying the term, Friedrich cites within the same paragraph the dualism of the characters Shen Te and Shui Ta in *The Good Person of Szechwan* (an element of the drama's narrative) and the duality between the actor and the role underlying Charles Laughton's performance of Galileo (an element of the theatre production's style) in Joseph Losey's 1947 staging of Brecht's eponymous drama.[25] Confusions of this sort could perhaps be avoided if the term "the principle of separation" were used instead of "montage" in reference to stylistic discontinuities of Brechtian films and theatrical productions. For this principle, too—as Friedrich correctly observes—is a factor of unity, although contrapuntal (as opposed to organic).[26]

The style of dominant cinema has been changing along with the understanding of Brecht in relation to the medium. The 1950s saw the demise of the Hollywood studio system, which coincided with the ascent of television, European art cinema, and American avant-garde film. All three were factors in the style's evolution, the current phase of which David Bordwell considers deserving of a separate name: intensified continuity. The first strategy Bordwell identifies as characteristic of the contemporary Hollywood style is increasingly rapid editing.[27] However, more important for this discussion than the ever-diminishing average shot length of Hollywood films is that the editing patterns currently employed in the industry often blur the spatio-temporal continuum and the causal relationship among shots and scenes. For instance, in Marc Forster's *Quantum of Solace* (2008), a narrative connection is established between the scene of a horse race and the sequence of an interrogation turning into a chase only after the film has crosscut between the two lines of action for a good minute. Put differently, it takes the film a considerable amount of screen time to confirm that the race scenes belong

to the diegesis. While the example does not exemplify intellectual editing, it does represent a departure from the classical Hollywood style of crosscutting, which seeks to avoid any kind of confusion in the narrative or in the organization of filmic space and time.

The strategies of intensified continuity, as well as the described editing pattern in *Quantum of Solace,* aim at distorting the everyday perception of reality, at making the familiar strange. But since the content of most Hollywood films fails to question dominant ideologies, the result is an empty spectacle that deadens the viewer's critical capacities, a far cry from what Brecht aimed for by the use of the technique in his own film practice. Adorno, who in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) allows that all modern art may be called montage if montage is understood as a broad artistic principle identical to construction (as opposed to "organic commingling" of elements), warns that "[t]he principle of montage was conceived as an act against a surreptitiously achieved organic unity; it was meant to shock. Once this shock is neutralized, the assemblage once more becomes merely indifferent material; the technique no longer suffices to trigger communication between the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic, and its interest dwindles to a cultural-historical curiosity."[28]

Perhaps recognizing that dominant cinema's adoption of montage has robbed the technique of its estranging potential, contemporary Brechtian filmmakers increasingly adopt as sources of *Verfremdung* the objects within the camera's field of view and the sounds within the microphone's range. I will illustrate this observation by comparing *History Lessons* and *Sophocles' Antigone in Hölderlin's Translation as Reworked for the Stage by Brecht* (hereafter abbreviated *Antigone*) by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, a directorial tandem commonly situated in the context of New German Cinema, a loose movement founded in the early 1960s in protest against the aesthetic and economic backwardness of the country's film industry. The two filmmakers worked together from their debut in 1962 with the short *Machorka-Muff* to 2006, the year of Huillet's death. Straub and Huillet refer to Brecht in their films and writings, two of their films are based upon Brecht's texts, and more than one of their techniques corresponds to Brecht's theoretical tenets.

The bulk of *History Lessons,* based on Brecht's unfinished novel *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar* (*The Business Affairs of Mr. Julius-Caesar,* 1938–39), consists of scenes of dialogue between an anonymous young man and representatives of different classes and professions who knew Caesar personally. The dialogue scenes are interspersed with those showing the young man silently driving the streets of Rome. The film produces estranging dialectical dualities by departing from the norms of descriptive realism and pointing to its artifice. First, it combines modern

costume for the young man and togas for the other characters, and configures the Rome of the ride scenes as contemporary. The two anachronisms challenge the spatio-temporal continuum a traditional cinematic narrative seeks to maintain, enhancing the novel's parallel between slavery (the dominant social system of Caesar's era) and capitalism (the dominant social system of the young man's era). Another of the film's structural dualities results from the use of languages (verbal and visual) in the dialogue scenes, and their absence from the ride scenes. The verbal language is Brecht's prose; the visual one is that of dominant cinema. More specifically, many of the dialogue scenes rely on a reformulated element of this language, namely the shot-countershot. In the scene with the peasant, the camera performs what Martin Walsh describes as intertwined circling of the two men: the alternating shots from the peasant to the young man fulfill the demands of the shot-countershot, but the camera placements, showing the characters from incompatible angles, do not.[29] The ride scenes, in contrast, use no dialogue and no editing (all three scenes are shot-sequences photographed from a fixed camera position). The third group of the film's dialectical dualities, concerning the mise-en-scène in the ride scenes, will be discussed at some length in the article's next segment.

Shot from the camera fixed in the backseat of the protagonist's convertible, these scenes do not obey the logic of narrative buildup that governs mainstream narrative cinema: none of the micro-events seen in the background of the frames is configured as dominant; none seems more important than the other. The ride scenes, as Walsh observes, serve as an index of the unintelligibility of history,[30] inviting us "to seize moments for analysis, draw knowledge out of chaos: systematize flux, immobilise flow, in order to attempt to comprehend it."[31]

The image of the young man in the car possesses a duality also in terms of action. In the context of the film that—like Brecht—challenges the notion of history as a matter of the past, the character's simultaneous moving and stillness becomes a trope for agency. Riding through the kind of Roman streets never shown on tourist flyers for the city, the young man's role fluctuates between that of a participant in and a mere observer of his surroundings.[32] The car's windshield distances him from the environment, but this distance gets closed by the turning wheels. If the prerequisite for the young man to take political action is to synthesize the information collected from his interviewees and the sights and sounds perceived during the ride, the prerequisite for the viewer to synthesize the film's material can be said to be a perceptual shift that will allow them to accept the ride scenes as action proper, equal in importance with the interviews.

Geschichtsunterricht (*History Lessons*), directed by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, 1972. Used by permission of Jean-Marie Straub.

The film invites a parallelism between the young man and the viewer, but it simultaneously discourages the process of identification promoted by dominant cinema with its Aristotelian roots. The camera shows the young man from the back, its vantage point preventing the viewer's interpretation of the sights and sounds of the streets in terms of his reactions to them. However, the rear-view mirror in front of the character returns his look, calling attention to the film's artifice, to the fact that what the viewer perceives as the character is merely an image, equal in status with the character's reflection in the center of the frame.[33] Showing an object in the manner of Cubist painters, from different directions, appears to mock the very phenomenon of perspective, which the shot otherwise emphasizes through the lines both present within it and only implied. The spatial split beside the direction of the man's look (returned at the viewer) and the direction in which he is moving rhymes with the temporal split indicated by the combination of modern and period costumes, thus connecting the two groups of scenes.

The final dialectical split within the film concerns images (dominant in the ride scenes) and words (dominant in the dialogue scenes). The fact that the impressions expressed in the previous sentence through the

adjective “dominant” can be challenged raises pertinent questions: is the viewer’s presumed tendency to rely on her hearing for the interview scenes, and on her sight for the ride ones, a sign of perceptual laziness? Would she be able to understand the workings of history better if she mobilized both senses?

History Lessons can be regarded as a paradigmatic montage film not merely because of the duality of its structure, but also for two more reasons: first, it manages—while foregrounding editing—to be dialectical through the use of other formal elements, and second, it conforms to the above formula of intellectual editing even more strictly than Eisenstein’s own scenes and *Kuhle Wampe*. While Eisenstein uses the technique only in certain scenes, the juxtaposition of two kinds of material in *History Lessons* that form a dialectical relationship occurs throughout the film. Moreover, while Dudow and Brecht’s film offers a synthesis of the dialectical opposition represented by the film’s two parts (the episode showing the workers’ mobilization through sport), *History Lessons* is resolutely open-ended. The “c” of the above-quoted Eisenstein’s formula of intellectual editing is, in the case of this film, not the viewer’s idea of the meaning that dialectically overcomes the “a” and “b” (the dialogue scenes and the ride scenes), but the viewer herself. If the progressiveness of a film can be measured by the force with which it compels the viewer to participate in the creation of its meaning—as *Screen* theorists posit is the case—*History Lessons* is worthy of the adjective “progressive.” Barton Byg’s commentary on Straub and Huillet’s *Moses und Aaron* (1974) applies here, too: “A parallel to Straub/Huillet and Brecht emerges here. There is no ‘resolution’ in their work, according to the hierarchical rules of traditional organization of meaning, but the relation of the organization of its materials to these traditional forms implies a resolution outside the work itself.”[34]

Unlike *History Lessons, Antigone* uses a relatively unobtrusive audiovisual style in conjunction with theatrical conventions. It should be noted at the outset of the discussion of this film that the appearance of theatrical conventions in the filmmakers’ cinema did not start with *Antigone:* George Lellis, commenting on Jean Narboni’s *Cahiers du cinéma* critique of Straub and Huillet’s filmic adaptation of Corneille’s *Othon* (1969), notes the film’s relation to theatre.[35] Narboni’s use of the term “theatricality” is, however, crucially different from this article’s. The *Cahiers du cinéma* critic introduces the term “theatrical scene” in contrast to linear perspective, which dominant cinema seeks to emulate. *Othon* is, he stresses, independent from the play text, which fact manifests itself in the way the film counters the cinematographic illusionism through frequent editing discontinuities, the presence of random noises of the

soundtrack such as horn sounds of the cars riding by the location, and the acting style that emphasizes the abstract aural qualities of the actors' deliveries rather than the words themselves.[36] For these reasons, Lellis concurs with Narboni: *Othon* "exists only for the camera."[37] *Antigone,* in contrast, asserts its palimpsestuous character not only through the title—which invokes all writers who have had a hand in the text—but also through the deliberately maintained traces of the production's initial incarnation as a theatre show produced at Berlin's Schaubühne in 1991. While *History Lessons* challenges the viewer to figure out the relationship between the two kinds of material, this *Antigone* raises questions of its relationship to the previous ones: the play's first performance, Hölderlin's *Antigone,* Brecht's *Antigone,* and Straub and Huillet's own theatrical version of the tragedy, thus blurring the distinction between the original and adaptation as its "copy."[38]

In Brecht's adaptation, the chorus is transformed into the elders financially benefiting from Kreon's war. (Their first line in the adaptation is "The wagons of booty are coming! The victory loaded with plunder to make Thebes forget the war!")[39] The relative complexity of the back story in the original play is done away with, the result being a concentration of the viewer's attention to the mechanism that links capitalism, war, and tyranny, as it is embodied in Kreon. "When I attacked Argos," he says, "who sent me? The metal spears went out / to bring metal from the mountains / at your request; for you know Argos / is rich in metals."[40] Brecht diverts focus from Argos to its exploiter, Thebes, by making Polynices and Eteokles soldiers of the same, Kreon's army. After seeing his brother killed on the battlefield, Polynices runs away to the desert, where Kreon himself punishes him by death.

The variety of angles and shot scales in *Antigone* is achieved solely through the use of lenses with different focal lengths and horizontal movements around the axis. The many camera pans explore the diegetic space freely, while simultaneously keeping, as Byg observes, the taboo of the space where the camera stands.[41] The camera's fixity invokes that of the viewer of traditional film and theatre, consequently implicating them in the narrative. It is as if the Antoinian fourth wall is crossed not by the actors—as happened regularly in Brecht's productions—but by the cinematographic apparatus itself. In other words, the camera hints at its presence precisely by denying the spectator a view of its position within the setting. The identified self-conscious stylistic premise is, however, not overt, but backgrounded. Hence Peter Handke's comparison of the "machinery" the film uses with that of Hawks or Raoul Walsh in the golden era of Hollywood.[42] In terms of the correlation between means and ends, then, *History Lessons* and *Antigone* stand in contrast to one

Danièle Huillet, the actress Libgart Schwarz, and Jean-Marie Straub at the set of *Antigone,* directed by Straub and Huillet, 1992. Used by permission of Jean-Marie Straub.

another: the former film uses a reformulated element of the syntax of dominant cinema to point to its own constructedness, whereas the latter uses an experimental stylistic premise to achieve the impression of a spatio-temporal continuity.

The relative transparence of the film's cinematography—and editing, as a concomitant technique—allows its theatricality in terms of both narrative and style to come to the fore. The first of three elements through which theatricality is achieved is the play text. Straub and Huillet eliminate the Brecht-added prologue to the drama which is set in Berlin in April 1945,[43] thus restoring the Aristotelian unities of the original. The second distinctly theatrical element is the setting: *Antigone* was shot in the Teatro di Segesta, a Greek theatre in Sicily dating from the fourth century BC. The third—and most prominent—theatrical element is the style of delivery and blocking. Characteristically, Straub and Huillet combine actors of various degrees of experience and ability. The figures' movements and gestures are extremely measured and used mostly for emphasis. Kreon, for example, when faced with Hamon's criticism of his rule, asserts his power by swinging his scepter as he dismisses his son's words on the account of his ignorance of the case, and raises his arms high in the air upon receiving the news of Megareus's death. Finally, the actors invariably follow the caesuras of Brecht's verse, pausing at the end of each line.

The pace of the cutting typically follows that of the delivery. When applied to quick exchanges, this logic—as Laurence Giavarini has observed—works to enhance the effect of stychomitia, already created by the dialogue.[44] The film's earliest example of this sort occurs when Kreon asks for the elders' approval to leave Polynices unburied. Their reply—"We approve it"—marks the beginning of a series of seven brief shots, in all but one of which a single sentence line is spoken by the character(s) shown in the image. Shot-reverse shot technique here employed is, of course, used also in continuity editing, the editing style dominant in Hollywood and other mainstream cinemas. But while a mainstream film would smooth the cuts through the use of sound bridges, *Antigone*—like *History Lessons*—rejects this essentially illusionistic device.

The same effect of drawing the viewer's attention to the cinematographic apparatus is achieved by carrying to an extreme the use of off-screen space in the instances where the film refrains from cutting for a relatively long period of time. For example, the camera holds Antigone in close-up for the portion of dialogue that occupies over two pages in the printed version, starting with the protagonist's words to the elders: "And you take it and let him shut you up."[45] Even more overt use of off-screen space occurs in the segments of shots devoid of human figures.

All four of such images in the film (each accompanied with an ode of the elders, and introduced through a pan away from the actors) show a stone formation in the ground that appears to mark the boundary between the orchestra and skene.

The original function of the two architectural elements of ancient Greek theatre seems relevant here. During a performance, skene would be occupied by a temporary construction with double purpose: to represent the location of the drama, and to serve as the changing-room for the actors. By temporarily abandoning the transparency of the film's style through self-conscious camera movements, and pointing to the dividing line between the space in the theatre of Segesta where the actors appeared in character, and the space where they were permitted to step out of it, Straub and Huillet seem to subtly invite the viewer to a meditation on the relationship between representation and presentation, between illusion and reality.

The estranging quality of the performance style in *Antigone* becomes apparent when set against the Stanislavski-inspired acting techniques of mainstream cinema. The dialectics of form (which lies in the contrast between the cinematography and editing and the theatrically stylized acting) mirrors the dialecticity of content. The latter is achieved by emphasizing the palimpsestuous nature of the play text and by giving the film a dialectical-materialist slant via the adaptation.

Examples of different manifestations of theatricality are found also in the recent output of other Brechtian filmmakers whose earlier works rely on montage and other medium-specific cinematic techniques. Consider, for example, the multilayered figure compositions in Peter Watkins's *La commune (Paris, 1871)* (The Commune [Paris, 1871], 2000), and the chalkboard setting in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005).[46] Finally, a caveat: the above discussion does not suggest that montage and theatricality cannot coexist as sources of *Verfremdung*. To paraphrase Brecht's footnote to the dramatic versus Epic Theatre schema: what I have discussed concerns merely a shift in emphasis (albeit a radical one).

Notes

1. Maiia Turovskaia, *Na granitse iskusstv: Brekht i kino* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1985), 224–33.

2. Doyle Greene, *Lips Hips Tits Power: The films of Russ Meyer* (London: Creation, 2004), 217.

3. Jonathan Rosenbaum, "*Mother Courage and Her Children* and *History Lessons*," http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=6576 (accessed May 6, 2010).

The terminological confusion around the term in the context of film studies is alleviated by Martin Brady's "Brecht and Film" (in Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 297–317.) Brady identifies three kinds of Brechtian cinema existing at present, each suggestive of one broad meaning of the adjective. Beside Brady's, the following English-language articles on the subject strike a balance between comprehensiveness and concision: Thomas Elsaesser, "From Anti-illusionism to Hyper-realism: Bertolt Brecht and Contemporary Film," in *Re-interpreting Brecht: His Influence on Contemporary Drama and Film,* ed. Pia Kleber and Colin Visser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 170–85; Marc Silberman, "Brecht and Film," and Barton Byg, "Brecht, New Waves, and Political Modernism in Cinema," in *A Bertolt Brecht Reference Companion,* ed. Siegfried Mews (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 197–219 and 220–37, respectively; and Angela Curran, "Bertolt Brecht," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film,* ed. Paisley Livingstone and Carl Plantinga (London: Routledge, 2009), 323–32.

4. See, for example, Roswitha Mueller's *Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Media* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 67–95.

5. In his later theoretical writings, Brecht refers to a somewhat evolved version of the theatrical model presented in "Notes" as dialectic. To highlight the focus of my inquiry on the similarities, rather than differences, between Brecht's different articulations of the concept, I use both terms in reference to it.

6. The translation of this, and the terms from the below-quoted section of Brecht's epic/dramatic theatre table, is borrowed from Bertolt Brecht's *Brecht on Theatre,* ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 37.

7. John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 56.

8. Rainer Friedrich, "On Brecht and Eisenstein," *Telos* 31 (Spring 1977): 156.

9. Brecht's anti-Kantian stance, investigated by Jan Bruck in relation to the concept of realism in the writer's "Brecht's and Kluge's Aesthetic of Realism" reflects itself also in the antagonism Brecht shows against Kant's dictum from *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* that "the finality in the product of fine art, intentional though it be, must not have the appearance of being intentional, i.e., fine art must be capable of being viewed as nature, is by the presence of perfect exactness in the agreement with rules prescribing how alone the product can be what it is intended to be, but with an absence of labored effect . . . i.e., without a trace of the artist having always had the rule presented to him and of its having fettered his mental powers." Jan Bruck, "Brecht's and Kluge's Aesthetic of Realism" in *Poetics* 17, no. 1–2 [1988]: 57–68; and Immanuel Kant, qtd. in Rainer Friedrich, "On Brecht and Eisenstein," 156. In his discussion of the idea of art's imitating nature's modes of production, Robert E. Wood traces the idea back to Plotinus. Robert E. Wood, *Placing Aesthetics: Reflections on the Philosophic Tradition* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press), 308.

10. The term "dominant cinema" is used to denote major film industries, all of which conform, in slightly varying degrees, to the narrative and stylistic principles of Hollywood.

11. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory,* ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 30.

12. Ibid., 45.

13. Note that if the variables a and b are broadened to apply not only to characters, but also to objects and abstractions, the simple formula becomes applicable to the dramaturgy of all mainstream, goal-oriented cinema.

14. Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis, "Theatricality: An Introduction," in *Theatricality,* ed. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 33.

15. Jacques Gerstenkorn, "Lever de rideau," in *Cinéma et Théatralité,* ed. Christine Hamon-Sirejols, Jacques Gerstenkorn, and André Gardies (Lyon: Aléas, 1994).

16. The other, equally common ones are alienation, distanciation, and defamiliarization.

17. Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke in 20 Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), 15:360.

18. Peter Wollen, "Manet: Modernism and Avant-Garde," *Screen* 21, no. 2 (1980): 23. Wollen offers a useful summary of why Brecht considered a traditional form of realism inadequate for what he considered the task of modern art: "On a purely descriptive level it tended to be local rather than global, and to show what was present simultaneously rather than past and future. It favored the actual rather than the possible and the observable rather than the unobservable. It was descriptive rather than explanatory. It effaced contradiction" (23).

19. Bertolt Brecht, "The Sound Film *Kuhle Wampe* or *Who Owns the World*? in *Brecht on Film and Radio,* ed. and trans. Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2000), 205.

20. Marc Silberman, "Whose Revolution? The Subject of *Kuhle Wampe,*" in Noah Isenberg, ed., *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 311.

21. In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), David Bordwell identifies also the other principles of classicism: decorum, proportion, formal harmony, respect for tradition, mimesis, and cool control of the perceiver's response (4).

22. Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1974): 8.

23. See, for example, the highly influential "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" by Roland Barthes, in Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 69–78.

24. Eisenstein, *Film Form,* 39; emphasis in the original.

25. Friedrich, "On Brecht and Eisenstein," 161.

26. Ibid., 160.

27. The others are "forcing the perspective" through the use of bipolar extremes of lens lengths, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements. David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 121.

28. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tie-

demann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 155–56. It should be noted that Brecht, unlike Eisenstein, repeatedly expresses wariness of the potential shock-effect of montage. In *The Messingkauf Dialogues* (1939–51), for example, he objects to the Surrealists' use of shock "for entertainment's sake," or—in the phrase of Seong-Kyun Oh—for not aiming for more than a mere destruction of the mundanely familiar. Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues,* trans. John Willet (London: Methuen, 1978), 78; Seong-Kyun Oh, *Die materialistisch-dialektische Fundierung des epischen Theaters Brechts als eines zweidimensionalen theatralischen Kommunikationssystems* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 180. Brecht's commentary on the Theatre of the Absurd applies here, too: "Die '*Verfremdung'* des absurden Theaters bleibt bei der '*Entfremdung*' stehen: 'verstehen—nicht verstehen (als Entfremdung)' [alienation, in the Marxist sense of the term]": "the '*Verfremdung* of the absurdist theatre remains at the '*Entfremdung*': 'understanding—not understanding' (as alienation)." Brecht, qtd. in Jan Knopf, *Brecht-Handbuch: Theater* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980), 401. Significantly, Brecht planned a rewrite of *Waiting for Godot,* in which the protagonists would be depicted in terms of their class positions: Pozzo would receive an aristocratic "von" and be described as a landowner, Lucky would be "a donkey or a policeman," Estragon a "prole," and Vladimir an "intellectual." Knopf, *Brecht-Handbuch: Theater,* 371.

29. Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* (London: BFI, 1981), 75.

30. Ibid., 65.

31. Ibid., 61.

32. The association of moving through space and agency, or at least of the mentioned activity and the young man, is further suggested by the scene where the otherwise taciturn character tells the banker an anecdote of Caesar's being captured by the pirates as he walks alongside him.

33. The parallelism between the viewer and the young man is promoted by the film's other instances of self-referentiality. Besides the use of a reformulated shot-countershot syntax, perhaps the most conspicuous of these is black leader, employed to break one of the banker's monologues.

34. Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance: The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 156.

35. George Lellis, *Bertolt Brecht, Cahiers du cinéma and Contemporary Film Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 132.

36. Ibid., 130.

37. Ibid., 132.

38. For more on the question of authorship over Brecht's adaptation of the Sophoclean tragedy, see Robert Savage, "The Precedence of Citation: On Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles,*" *Colloquy: Text Theory Critique* 11 (May 2006): 99–126.

39. Bertolt Brecht, *Sophocles' Antigone,* trans. Judith Malina (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1990), 20.

40. Ibid., 56.

41. Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance,* 226.

42. Peter Handke, "Antigone," in *Die Früchte des Zorns und der Zärtlichkeit* (Vienna: Viennale, 2004), 118.

43. The prologue features two nameless sisters who find out that their brother has been hanged for deserting the army. As they are preparing to cut the brother's body from the rope, an officer appears. After the sisters' denial that they know each other, the officer asks, "Then what is she doing with the knife?" Brecht, *Sophocles' Antigone,* 14. The prologue ends with the uncertainty of the second sister's next act. "Would she now," asks the first sister, "under the penalty of death / try to free her brother?" By substituting a closure to the scene with the first sister's words ("If only he had not died"), Brecht diverts the focus from the narrative to the question of heroism—both of the second sister and of the heroine of the play proper.

44. Giavarini, qtd. in Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance,* 223.

45. Brecht, *Sophocles' Antigone,* 32.

46. For an interesting (if questionable in its conclusions) discussion of Peter Watkins's relationship to Brecht, see Terry Lajtha's "Brechtian Devices in Non-Brechtian Cinema" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1981): 9–14. For an extensive recent investigation of von Trier's relationship to Brecht, see Anneliese Penzendorfer's *Lars von Triers DOGVILLE: Ein Fusion Film vs. Brechts episches Theater* (VDM Verlag, 2010).

Copyright of Theatre Symposium is the property of University of Alabama Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.